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Leaders working to fix overcrowding at schools

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[Kate Ryan](#), wtop.com

ROCKVILLE, Md. - If you have visited your child's classroom recently, you may have seen hallways more crowded than the Beltway? Or maybe you have seen school playgrounds overrun with 'temporary classrooms' that look like trailers?

Montgomery County Councilmember Roger Berliner says that's why the county should keep its current policy of charging developers a per pupil premium when a school goes 105 percent over capacity.

"We have elementary schools that are so overcrowded it should not be tolerated."

But several other councilmembers wondered if the formula shouldn't be changed. And due to the lousy economy, the number of developers applying for building permits has dropped.

"It does seem to me that we are once again engaged in a dialogue about how to valiantly beat back the growth that isn't happening," Councilmember George Leventhal says.

Leventhal backed a plan to boost the percentage to 110 percent, which would still mean developers would pay for growth, but might keep them from going elsewhere to build.

"At what point are we demanding so many extractions that we get zero revenue because the project becomes unaffordable?"

Pamela Dunn, with the Montgomery County Planning Department, was asked if developers are choosing to build somewhere else given the cost?

"It's really hard for us to know that. We do see fewer applications being submitted, but the economy's really not in a good place right now, so it's hard to distinguish which caused what."

Councilmember Valerie Ervin, who has been a member of the Board of Education, asked if going from 105 percent over capacity to 110 percent makes a difference when the recent surge in school population wasn't a result of new development, but people moving from private to public school, and others doubling up in more affordable housing?

"I just need to be real clear on what this actually gets us -- or not."

In the end, the council voted to keep the current policy of having impact fees kick in at that 105 percent capacity level. Ervin was not convinced that means more locker space for your child.

"We just voted for something that's not going to get us anywhere."

She said the council should stop "talking to people like we've solved the problem. The problem's not solved."

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